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ABSTRACT

This report asserts that the the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) are failing. The report claims that teacher incompetence, bureaucratic corruption, crumbling infrastructure, violence, lax academic standards, and wasteful spending are some of the many problems, and children attending the DCPS are not receiving a quality education. Failure of the government-run school system is not new. This failure preceded white flight from the District in the 1950s and has continued despite inflation-adjusted increases in spending, reduced class size, and attempts to reform the system from within. DCPS does not lack money. Despite having per-pupil spending that ranks among the highest in the nation, DCPS students rank near the bottom on standardized tests and achievement levels. Although spending has tripled since 1980, the system lacks qualified teachers, safe facilities, and basic supplies. To improve education in the District, this report recommends considering options beyond spending more money in this troubled system. It notes that change must not be limited to propping up the current system, but rather the city must find a way to create competition within the system in order to empower parents, foster an environment that will allow education entrepreneurs to flourish, and take education out of the hands of feuding politicians. (Contains 77 endnotes.) (SM)

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Policy Analysis

No. 461 December 10, 2002

Routing

# The Need for Educational Freedom in the Nation's Capital

by Casey J. Lartigue Jr.

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## Executive Summary

The public school system in the nation's capital is failing. Teacher incompetence, bureaucratic corruption, crumbling infrastructure, violence, lax academic standards, and wasteful spending are among the litany of problems plaguing the District of Columbia Public Schools. By almost any educational achievement measure, the children attending public schools within the shadow of the U.S. Capitol are not receiving a quality education.

While critics of DCPS tend to focus on the failures of particular superintendents or administrators bedeviled by scandal or incompetence, the failure of the government-run school system in the District of Columbia is not new. This failure preceded white flight from the District in the mid-1950s and has continued despite inflation-adjusted increases in spending, reduced class size, and attempts to reform the system from within. In short, the good old days of public education in the nation's capital never were.

Contrary to the claims of defenders of the public school system, DCPS does not lack money. Despite having per-pupil spending that ranks among the highest in the nation—$10,550 for 1999–2000—public school students in the District rank near the bottom on standardized tests and in achievement levels. Although spending has almost tripled since the 1980–81 school year and increased 39 percent since Mayor Anthony Williams took office in 1998, the system lacks qualified teachers, safe facilities, and even basic supplies such as pencils and textbooks. The system's leaders demand more money in exchange for more promises of improvement.

To improve education in the nation's capital, we must consider options beyond spending more money in a system that even supporters acknowledge is troubled. Change must not be limited to propping up the current system. Public schools that are little more than holding pens must not be sheltered from private competition. The city must find a way to create competition within the system, with the goals of giving parents power over the education of their children, fostering an environment that will create a climate for education entrepreneurs to flourish, and taking education out of the hands of feuding politicians.

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**Has the District been successful in fulfilling its mission to educate District residents? Unfortunately, it has not.**

## Introduction

*Let us keep our eye steadily on the whole system.*

—Thomas Jefferson, February 15, 1821[1]

The year 2004 will mark the bicentennial of the founding of public education in Washington, D.C. The school system was established by the city council on December 5, 1804, in an act "to establish and endow a permanent institution for the education of youth in the city of Washington." Thomas Jefferson, then president of the United States, was named one of the trustees as well as president of the board after he contributed $200 toward the endowment of the schools.[2]

A comprehensive report prepared by a select committee and adopted by the board of trustees on September 19, 1805, read: "In these schools poor children shall be taught reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, and such branches of the mathematics as may qualify them for the professions they are intended to follow."[3]

Has the District been successful in fulfilling its mission to educate District residents? Unfortunately, it has not. During congressional hearings, a U.S. Senator concluded: "A crisis has been reached in the school system of Washington. The education of more than 60,000 children is involved." While that would accurately describe the situation in the nation's capital today, those words were actually spoken by Sen. Pat Harrison (D-Miss.) in May 1920, in a select committee report investigating the D.C. public school system.[4]

Harrison's words were echoed in a report issued 76 years later. In 1995 Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed a law creating a presidentially appointed District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Board (usually referred to as the "Control Board") to rescue the District from its financial troubles. A year later in its report, the Control Board labeled the leadership of D.C.'s public school system "dysfunctional," concluded that children had been cheated out of a decent education, and stripped the D.C. Board of Education of its powers until June 2000. The Control Board noted that its assessment found that "for each additional year that students stay in DCPS, the less likely they are to succeed, not because they are unable to succeed, but because the system does not prepare them to succeed."[5]

Other reports throughout the past century have documented failures with the public school system:

- In a 1939 report to the D.C. Board of Education, the superintendent of D.C. schools decried "illiterates"[6] in the District's white schools and pointed out that principals requested police protection from "youthful hoodlums."[7]
- In 1947, seven years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Hobart M. Corning, then the new superintendent of schools, declared that Washington, D.C., had "one of the sorriest school systems in the country."[8]
- A 1949 survey of D.C. schools by Columbia University professor George F. Strayer found poor academic achievement among blacks and whites: "All white divisions were retarded in paragraph meaning and word meaning, and spelling scores were below national norms." Strayer found that "nearly all [white] junior high schools were below national norms by approximately one year," while "the median for all [black] junior schools was 2 fi years below norms."[9]
- An analysis of standardized test scores in the 1950s reveals that even when one-third of the students in the District were white, public school students in the District were trailing the national average on all subjects tested.[10]
- In 1967, a comprehensive 15-month study of the government schools in the District of Columbia by Columbia University professor A. Harry Passow

found a "low level of scholastic achievement as measured by performance on standardized tests."[11] A few months earlier in an editorial entitled "The Silent Disaster," the *Washington Post* said, "The collapse of public education in Washington is now evident."[12]

Unfortunately, academic underachievement of D.C. public school students has persisted to this day. Despite numerous alarming reports, superintendents being fired or forced out, and attempts to reform the system from within, public education in the nation's capital has consistently produced education trailing the national and regional average on every conceivable measure of academic achievement.

- In the late 1970s at the University of the District of Columbia, the only public institution of higher education in the District, it took one year of remediation on average to bring D.C. public school students up to speed; today, the average is about two years, according to sources at UDC and in the city government. Eighty-five percent of D.C. public school graduates who enter the University of the District of Columbia need remedial education.[13]
- A majority of D.C. public school graduates who took the U.S. Armed Forces Qualification Test—a vocational aptitude exam—got a failing grade in 1994, the most recent year for which results are available.[14]
- An estimated 40 percent of students who start the 8th grade in D.C. drop out or leave before graduating.[15] This is not a recent phenomenon—a 1976 report cited estimates from the statistical office of the D.C. schools that between 30 and 35 percent of students who entered the 7th grade would not complete high school. The same report found that 47 percent of D.C. pupils who were enrolled in the 7th grade in 1964-65 had dropped out and not finished high school by the 1969-70 year.[16]
- From 1978 to 1996, D.C. public school students routinely performed below the national average on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills.[17] Students in lower grades often performed at or above the national average starting in 1983. In contrast, D.C. high school students consistently trailed the national average on CTBS.[18]
- In 2001, D.C. private school students averaged 1200 on the SAT, while D.C. public school students averaged 798.[19] D.C. public school students score 222 points below the national average (1020) on the SAT.[20]
- On the Stanford 9 achievement test in 2001, 25 percent of D.C. students read and 36 percent performed math at the "Below Basic" level, demonstrating little or no mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills at their grade level. Seventy percent of 10th and 11th graders performed math at the Below Basic level.[21] On the National Assessment of Educational Progress, D.C. students scored well below the national average on the scale score, with more than 85 percent of students scoring at the Basic or Below Basic level.
- Thirty-seven percent of District residents read at or below 3rd-grade level, according to the State Education Agency, Adult Education, University of the District of Columbia.[22]

As reports over the last seven decades have concluded, the public schools in the District of Columbia have failed to provide children with an adequate education.

## DCPS as an Adult Employment Center

In 1940, the D.C. Board of Education adopted a statement of philosophy of education for the public schools of the District of Columbia. Developed by teachers and offi-

**D.C. students scored well below the national average on the scale score, with more than 85 percent of students scoring at the Basic or Below Basic level.**

cers, the statement proclaimed that the child "is the center of the educational process."[23]

Has the D.C. public school system put children at "the center of the educational process"? A review of the historical record reveals that children have been herded into unsafe schools, taught by teachers that even the president of the school board derided as unqualified or incompetent,[24] and been promoted to higher grades although they had yet to master lower-level work.

Evidence that administrators have put themselves ahead of children abounds:

- In 1979, the school system had 113,000 students and 511 office positions. By 1992, the school system had lost 33,000 students, but the number of central office positions had almost doubled, to 967.[25]
- The *Washington Post* reported in 1997 that officials had misallocated to salaries $1.6 million intended for extra instruction for underprivileged students as required by law. The federal government revoked $20 million of grants because the system had mismanaged grant funds.[26]
- A 1990 internal school audit and a 1995 study of census data found that the District padded enrollment totals, overreporting the number of students by 6,500 in 1990 and by more than 13,000 during the following years until 1995. "I've never seen a discrepancy like this before," said George Grier, the demographer who conducted the 1995 study. "Either kids are staying in the city while their parents are leaving or something equally strange is happening." As the *Washington Post* reported, the discrepancy had been discussed by the school board, but it was not publicly disclosed for months—after the board had requested a $100 million increase in the school budget.[27]
- Year after year, the schools have employed more people than authorized in annual budgets approved by the D.C. Council and Congress.[28]
- In 1997, the *Washington Post* learned that school officials had "reprogrammed" money to pay unauthorized workers by keeping two sets of books.[29]
- The city and federal government spend almost $11,000 per pupil in the District, an amount well above the national average and similar to nearby regions that are performing much better, and yet the system lacks basic school supplies or facilities.
- This year, a GAO report found that the system's billion-dollar modernization program is behind schedule and already $170 million over budget.[30]
- DCPS has one employee for every six students. The system is so bureaucratically heavy that only about half of the people on the DCPS payroll are teachers.[31]

As the above facts show, the DCPS has not put children at the center of the educational process. Instead, too many people have focused on saving the system as a whole, even at the cost of students being poorly educated. Although the system has been a failure, attempts to put competitive pressure on the failing system have consistently been blocked by the District's elected officials.

**Although the system has been a failure, attempts to put competitive pressure on the failing system have consistently been blocked by the District's elected officials.**

## The Worst of the Worst

As shown in Table 1, 13 of 19 high schools in the District of Columbia have more than 90 percent of their students reading at a basic or below-basic level. "Below Basic" indicates little or no mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills. "Basic" denotes only partial mastery of the knowledge.[32]

In addition, 14 of 19 D.C. high schools have 90 percent of students unable to perform math above the Basic level. Despite this, more than 80 percent of senior high school students at District of Columbia Public Schools get promoted to the next grade. At 6 of 19 DCPS high schools, only 1 percent of students scored at the "Proficient" or "Advanced" level in mathemat-

**Table 1**
**Stanford 9 Reading and Math Scores, 2001 (in percentages)**

| High School | Reading Scores | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Promoted |
| Anacostia | 71 | 28 | 1 | 0 | 78.9 |
| Ballou | 63 | 34 | 4 | 0 | 64.4 |
| Banneker | 2 | 31 | 58 | 10 | 98.8 |
| Bell Multicultural | 53 | 42 | 5 | 0 | 84.6 |
| Business & Finance SWSC at Woodson | 27 | 63 | 9 | 1 | 95.0 |
| Cardozo | 56 | 41 | 3 | 0 | 82.7 |
| Coolidge | 51 | 41 | 8 | 0 | 82.1 |
| Dunbar | 54 | 42 | 3 | 0 | 92.6 |
| Eastern | 46 | 46 | 8 | 0 | 87.5 |
| Ellington School of the Arts | 46 | 46 | 19 | 1 | 87.0 |
| Moore Academy | 78 | 22 | 0 | 0 | N/A |
| Phelps | 66 | 29 | 4 | 1 | 77.0 |
| Preengineering SWSC[1] at Dunbar | 13 | 65 | 21 | 1 | 96.5 |
| Roosevelt | 54 | 40 | 5 | 0 | 88.5 |
| School Without Walls | 2 | 33 | 49 | 16 | 96.5 |
| Spingarn | 61 | 32 | 7 | 0 | 80.2 |
| M. M. Washington | 62 | 36 | 2 | 0 | 90.2 |
| Wilson | 32 | 42 | 21 | 6 | 92.2 |
| Woodson | 62 | 30 | 8 | 0 | 71.5 |
| Systemwide | 25 | 46 | 23 | 6 | 86.6[2] |

| High School | Math Scores | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Promoted |
| Anacostia | 92 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 78.9 |
| Ballou | 83 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 64.4 |
| Banneker | 9 | 47 | 39 | 5 | 98.8 |
| Bell Multicultural | 54 | 38 | 8 | 0 | 84.6 |
| Business & Finance SWSC at Woodson | 48 | 44 | 8 | 0 | 95.0 |
| Cardozo | 79 | 16 | 5 | 0 | 82.7 |
| Coolidge | 79 | 19 | 2 | 0 | 82.1 |
| Dunbar | 86 | 13 | 1 | 0 | 92.6 |
| Eastern | 80 | 18 | 1 | 0 | 87.5 |
| Ellington School of the Arts | 61 | 30 | 8 | 1 | 87.0 |
| Moore Academy | 99 | 1 | 0 | 0 | N/A |
| Phelps | 90 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 77.0 |
| Preengineering SWSC[1] at Dunbar | 28 | 40 | 29 | 3 | 96.5 |
| Roosevelt | 80 | 18 | 2 | 0 | 88.5 |
| School Without Walls | 13 | 44 | 34 | 9 | 96.5 |
| Spingarn | 74 | 12 | 14 | 0 | 80.2 |
| M. M. Washington | 92 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 90.2 |
| Wilson | 50 | 28 | 16 | 6 | 62.2 |
| Woodson | 78 | 20 | 3 | 0 | 71.5 |
| Systemwide | 36 | 36 | 21 | 7 | 86.6[2] |

Source: Paul L. Vance, *A Five-Year Statistical Glance at D.C. Public Schools: School Years 1996–97 Through 2000–01* (Washington: Division of Educational Accountability, Student Accounting Branch, February 2002). See also District of Columbia Public Schools, www.k12.dc.us/dcps/schools/schools_frame.html.

Terms and definitions, according to Harcourt:
Below Basic: The student has little or no mastery of skills needed for that subject in that grade.
Basic: The student has partially mastered skills needed for that grade level.
Proficient: The student has mastered skills needed for the grade level.
Advanced: The student is above grade level.
[1]School-Within-a-School Charter
[2]The systemwide percentage is for students in grades 7–12.

ics. M. M. Washington High School and Luke Moore Academy had fewer than 1 percent scoring at those levels. Yet most of the students at D.C. schools were promoted to the next grade. D.C. elected officials and education representatives who oppose school choice don't often discuss the outright failure of some schools, highlighted in Table 2. DCPS students score well below the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (see Table 3). Even the staunchest school choice opponents decline to defend the current performance of some D.C. public schools.[33]

What could be the argument against allowing children a choice to leave the worst performing schools? It certainly can't be that they'll somehow be worse off than they already are. Not every child would leave, but children whose parents want to make a change should be allowed to do so.

## The Case for School Choice

According to D.C. school board president Peggy Cooper Cafritz: "All of our high schools—except Banneker, Walls, Ellington, and Wilson—are generally lousy, so where do we send the children?"[34] Even a school like Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School, at one time one of the leading high schools in the city regardless of race, is mediocre. (See text box).

**Table 2**
**Worst Performing Schools on Stanford 9, Reading and Math Scores, 2001**

| | Reading Scores | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High School | Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Promoted |
| Anacostia | 71 | 28 | 1 | 0 | 78.9 |
| Ballou | 63 | 34 | 4 | 0 | 64.4 |
| Dunbar | 54 | 42 | 3 | 0 | 92.6 |
| Eastern | 46 | 46 | 8 | 0 | 87.5 |
| Moore Academy | 78 | 22 | 0 | 0 | N/A |
| M. M. Washington | 62 | 36 | 2 | 0 | 90.2 |
| Systemwide | 25 | 46 | 23 | 6 | 86.6[1] |

| | Math Scores | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High School | Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Promoted |
| Anacostia | 92 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 78.9 |
| Ballou | 83 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 64.4 |
| Dunbar | 86 | 13 | 1 | 0 | 92.6 |
| Eastern | 80 | 18 | 1 | 0 | 87.5 |
| Moore Academy | 99 | 1 | 0 | 0 | N/A |
| M. M. Washington | 92 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 90.2 |
| Systemwide | 36 | 36 | 21 | 7 | 86.6[1] |

Source: Paul L. Vance, *A Five-Year Statistical Glance at D.C. Public Schools: School Years 1996–97 through 2000–01* (Washington: Division of Educational Accountability, Student Accounting Branch, February 2002). See also, District of Columbia Public Schools, www.k12.dc.us/dcps/schools/schools_frame.html.

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Proficient: The student has mastered skills needed for the grade level.
Advanced: The student is above grade level.
[1]The systemwide percentage is for students in grades 7–12.

**Table 3**
**District of Columbia, NAEP Performance**

| Subject | Grade | Year | Scale Score D.C. Avg. | Scale Score National Avg. | Achievement Level (Percentage) Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mathematics | 4 | 1992 | 193 | [219] | 77 | 18 | 4 | 1 |
| (scale: 0-500) | | 1996 | 187 | [222] | 80 | 15 | 4 | 1 |
| | | 2000 | 193 | [226] | 76 | 18 | 5 | 1 |
| | 8 | 1990 | 231 | [262] | 83 | 14 | 2 | 1 |
| | | 1992 | 235 | [267] | 78 | 18 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 1996 | 233 | [271] | 80 | 15 | 4 | 1 |
| | | 2000 | 234 | [274] | 77 | 17 | 5 | 1 |
| Reading | 4 | 1992 | 188 | [215] | 70 | 20 | 8 | 2 |
| (scale: 0-500) | | 1994 | 179 | [212] | 76 | 16 | 6 | 2 |
| | | 1998 | 182 | [215] | 72 | 18 | 7 | 3 |
| | 8 | 1998 | 236 | [261] | 56 | 32 | 11 | 1 |
| Science | 8 | 1996 | 113 | [148] | 81 | 14 | 5 | 0 |
| (scale: 0-300) | | | | | | | | |
| Writing | 8 | 1998 | 126 | [148] | 37 | 52 | 10 | 1 |
| (scale: 0-300) | | | | | | | | |

Source: *Nation's Report Card*, National Center for Education Statistics: Washington D.C., 2001.

## The Case of Dunbar High School

The case of Paul Laurence Dunbar High School is particularly poignant. Dunbar, one of the District's struggling high schools, is divided into two parts: the regular school and the School Within a School, which focuses on preengineering. Today, 99 percent of Dunbar's regular students score below the proficient level in math and 96 percent do so in reading. But the school has seen much brighter days. A 1956 newspaper series on D.C. public schools noted that despite the inferior performance of predominately black schools, there was one clear exception: "Dunbar High School, virtually all-Negro, had the city's best college-entrance record both last year and the year before, and a big quota of its graduates got scholarships."

Founded in 1870 by a group of freed slaves, Dunbar produced an honor roll of firsts, including the first black cabinet officer, the first black Army general, the first black federal district judge, and the first black U.S. senator since Reconstruction, as well as Charles Drew, a pioneer in the development of blood banks. As early as 1892, Dunbar students outperformed students at other schools—both black and white. In the 1950s, when the school was still segregated, Dunbar was sending 80 percent of its graduates to college, the highest percentage of any school in the District, regardless of race.

Dunbar achieved those impressive results despite the lack of many amenities, such as small student-teacher ratios and new facilities, now considered necessary to student achievement. None of those drawbacks took away from a demanding curriculum, which included as requirements for graduation two years of foreign language, biology, chemistry, physics, American history, and algebra. Students ran the school's banking, biology, chemistry, contemporary literature, and library clubs. The Dunbar High School experience shows what can happen when a school is free from centralized bureaucratic control and when parents and students are able to choose the schools they attend.



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**A competitive system that used a combination of vouchers, tuition tax credits, and contracting would be the best way to increase educational quality.**

There is no reason to limit the choices of schools to those in the current system. Because of the District's long-term failure to educate District children, any solution limited to the D.C. public schools would have little benefit. What is needed is a system that allows parents and children to opt out of the D.C. schools and select another provider. A competitive system that used a combination of vouchers, tuition tax credits, and contracting would be the best way to increase educational quality.

The historical case for school choice in America goes back to the nation's founding. Adam Smith, whose writings greatly influenced America's founding fathers, noted that government-run education was likely to be inferior to privately run education.[35] In 1859, John Stuart Mill argued that government should seek to make sure that every child gets educated, but he also wrote that government should not itself be in charge of that education.[36] In 1955, Milton Friedman proposed vouchers as a way to separate government financing of education from government administration of public schools.[37] More recently, a number of states have adopted school choice plans that allow parents to choose the schools their children attend. Evidence continues to mount that those programs increase parental involvement, raise the academic performance of students in both public and private schools, and create incentives for both public and private schools to improve.[38]

For much of American history, choice and parental control played a far greater role in education than they do today. Indeed, for more than 100 years after the nation's founding, there was no public "system" of education.[39] Instead, schooling was primarily a family responsibility, which was accomplished through tutors and private schools. Even after the advent of the common school, parents had a large role in governing schools. Not until the first few decades of the 1900s did school "systems" arise under the control of political authority far removed from the local neighborhood school. Since that time, education has been treated like a government monopoly and has become increasingly resistant to change.

Bureaucratic monopolies don't work in education any more than they work in medicine, telecommunications, or manufacturing. As Cato's executive vice president David Boaz notes in *Liberating Schools: Education in the Inner City*, "Perhaps it is time to learn, as the reformers around Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev came to understand, that bureaucratic monopolies don't work and that reform won't fix them. We have run our schools the way the Soviet Union and its client states ran their entire economies, and the results have been just as disillusioning."[40]

Rather than trying to reform the system, future efforts should be directed at ending the monopoly that public schools currently have over education by giving parents the freedom to choose between private and public schools. A program of tax credits or vouchers of a sufficient amount to allow parents to choose a private school if they so desire would transform parents from hostages into customers. Placing parents on an equal par with customers of other services would deprive DCPS of its monopoly position and would allow existing and new private schools to help students whose present options are limited to poorly performing schools.

Choice that is common in most sectors of the economy is slowly becoming more prevalent in education. For more than five decades, the courts have permitted school districts to reimburse parents of children in religious schools for public transportation costs.[41] Since 1955, K-12 schools in Minnesota have been allowed low-income parents to have a small tax credit for private education.[42] Milwaukee became the first district in the country with a publicly funded, K-12 school choice option. Private donors have also come forward to finance scholarships for low-income children in New York City, Dayton, San Antonio, Indianapolis, and Washington, D.C. Cleveland's school choice program, which passed the scrutiny of the U.S. Supreme Court, now provides vouchers to more than 3,700 schoolchildren.[43]

If the public schools were educating every child, it might make less sense to challenge the

government's monopoly on educating students whose parents can't afford to pay for private schooling. But in a system where a large percentage of students are achieving at low levels, it is more difficult to accept limiting educational choices to public schools. Researchers have generally found positive gains for students in school choice programs that include both public and private schools. For example, Caroline Hoxby of Harvard University observed: "Overall, an evaluation of Milwaukee suggests that public schools made a strong push to improve achievement in the face of competition from vouchers. The schools that faced the most potential competition from vouchers raised achievement dramatically."[44] Paul Peterson and his colleagues at Harvard University have shown that choice programs benefit black students in particular. Their findings revealed that black students who attended private schools after winning vouchers through lotteries had higher test scores than comparable students who had entered the same lotteries but remained in public schools.[45] Cecilia Rouse, a Princeton University economist and a former staff member of the Clinton administration's Council of Economic Advisers, analyzed data from Milwaukee and found that "students selected for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program . . . likely scored 1.5–2.3 percentile points per year in math more than students in the comparison groups."[46]

The District of Columbia must find a way to create competition within the system, thereby giving parents power over the education of their children, fostering an environment that will create a climate for education entrepreneurs to flourish, and taking education out of the hands of feuding politicians. Instead of worrying about "saving" the public schools by limiting choices to just a handful of schools, the emphasis must be on setting up a system whereby schools are competing for each child.

## Blocking the Exits

Local officials have resisted past efforts to allow children to escape failing public schools. In 1981, an initiative placed on the ballot by the D.C. Committee for Improved Education would have allowed families earning less than $20,000 a year to receive a $1,200 local income tax credit to be used for private school fees or to pay for supplemental programs at government schools. At the time, the average per-pupil cost at private schools was $2,857. D.C. residents voted 9 to 1 against the measure.[47] Bill Keyes, then-chairman of the local affiliate of the National Taxpayers Union, which mounted the tax credit drive, claimed the measure was defeated by a "vigorous smear campaign." According to the *Washington Post*, "A group of labor unions, spearheaded by the American Federation of Teachers, said they would spend up to $200,000 in fighting the measure."[48] Up to that point, supporters had raised about $114,000. Opponents denounced the initiative as "racist."[49] Floretta D. McKenzie, superintendent of DCPS, urged defeat of the educational tax credit, saying it would "hurt young people and our struggling District government."[50] The League of Women Voters, the American Federation of Teachers, the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations, the American Civil Liberties Union, the D.C. Congress of Parents and Teachers, the entire city council, the school board, the Washington Teachers Union, Parents United for Full Funding, the American Federation of Government Employees Council 211, D.C. delegate Walter Fauntroy, the local chapter of the NAACP, and every candidate for mayor opposed the initiative.[51] D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, who said the city would have to increase property taxes 20–40 percent if the initiative passed, joined city officials and residents in filing challenges to the education tax credit initiative.[52] The D.C. Board of Elections eliminated the initiative from the ballot, although the D.C. Court of Appeals later reversed the decision.[53]

The District is not the only urban school system struggling with educating its residents, but it is the only one for which Congress has clear constitutional authority to "exercise exclusive legislation in all cases

**In a system where a large percentage of students are achieving at low levels, it is more difficult to accept limiting educational choices to public schools.**

whatsoever."[54] In 1998, Congress passed a voucher plan for the District. The District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act (H.R. 1797), cosponsored by House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.) and Rep. William Lipinski (D-Ill.), was vetoed by President Clinton.[55] That $7 million plan would have offered up to $3,200 in tuition subsidies to 2,000 low-income students for use at the public, private, or parochial school of their choice.

In April 2001, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) announced that he would offer a voucher proposal on the Senate floor as an amendment to an education bill.[56] Called "Educational Choices for Disadvantaged Children," the proposal would have created a $25 million fund for vouchers. The D.C. Board of Education would have been empowered to select low-performing schools and make scholarships worth $2,000 a year for four years available through a lottery for students to use at public or private schools.[57]

After a storm of criticism from D.C. officials and activist groups, McCain withdrew the bill. In a letter to McCain, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's nonvoting representative, denounced the bill as "a disservice to the high standards of education accountability for every child the District of Columbia has set for itself."[58]

Has the District been able to establish "high standards of education accountability for every child"? That may be the goal, but it is not the reality. The problems in D.C. schools are so entrenched that we should allow children to seek education outside of the government-run education system. Unfortunately, city leaders and voters continue to resist efforts to provide educational choice for students and families dissatisfied with the system, although the system clearly is failing.

**Thousands of D.C. parents have made it clear that they want school choice.**

## Private Options in the District

The percentage of students in private schools in the District has increased over the last four decades. During the same time, the number of children in D.C. public schools has decreased markedly, from a high of 149,000 in 1969 to 68,000 in 2001, its lowest number in seven decades.[59] This is partially due to a drop in the number of school-age children in the District. However, even given that drop, the number of students in private schools has remained relatively stable. In 1960, 20,466 children attended private and parochial schools in the District.[60] According to D.C. Board of Education, today there are more than 18,000 students attending private schools in the District of Columbia.[61]

Thousands of D.C. parents have made it clear that they want school choice. One indication of this desire is the Washington Scholarship Fund, a private fund set up to distribute partial scholarships to low-income students. Every year thousands of low-income students apply for approximately 100 scholarships given out each year. Eligible families must reside in the District, qualify for the federal school lunch program, and have a child entering kindergarten through eighth grade. Students are chosen from a randomly based lottery drawing in February. The maximum amount of the scholarship ranges from $2,000 for K-8 to $3,000 for high school.[62]

The D.C. public school system is spending more than $10,000 per student yet yielding disastrous educational results. Although spending on education has grown 39 percent since Mayor Williams took office in 1998, there are still demands to further increase spending.[63] In March 2001, in response to complaints that education spending had not increased fast enough, Mayor Williams asked: "But really, how can you justify increasing funds for a school system that is losing students?"[64]

He was right. But a more important question is, How much longer can the District justify forcing children to attend schools that most people acknowledge are troubled? The failure of the D.C. public schools didn't happen overnight and there is little reason to believe that administrators have the ability to overcome several decades of failure.

Spending more money, changing administrators, and even giving the mayor more power over the schools have not improved the system.[65]

There are several school choice models that should be considered for the District:

**Opportunity Scholarships**

Rep. Armey has introduced H.R. 5033, a bill designed to bring school choice to low-income District residents. The District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 2002 would establish the District of Columbia Scholarship Corporation, a private, nonprofit corporation independent of both the federal and D.C. governments. Congress would allocate $7 million for fiscal year 2003, $8 million for fiscal year 2004, and $10 million for each fiscal year from 2005 to 2007 to a fund known as the District of Columbia Scholarship Fund. The secretary of the Treasury would administer the funds to the corporation, which in turn would issue the scholarships directly to parents.

To be eligible for the Opportunity Scholarship, students would have to be residents of the District and their family incomes could not exceed 185 percent ($33,226 for a family of four) of the poverty line. For students at or below the poverty line, a scholarship may not exceed the lesser of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees (and transportation, when necessary) or $5,000 for the fiscal year 2003, adjusted for inflation in 2004–07. For students whose families earn up to 185 percent above the poverty level, tuition scholarship may not exceed the lesser of 75 percent of tuition and mandatory fees (and transportation, when necessary) or $3,750 for fiscal year 2003.[66]

DCSC would be allowed to contract with individuals and private, state, and federal agencies, organizations, and institutions. Eligible schools must demonstrate that they have operated with at least 25 students during the three years prior to when they apply. Newer institutions may apply for a one-year provisional certification.

The federal comptroller general would hire an independent evaluator to compare test scores, graduation rates, and parental satisfaction of scholarship students with DCPS students of similar backgrounds. There will also be a study of the impact of the reforms on the DCPS. Each September, the corporation will submit a progress report to the appropriate congressional committees.

One common argument against such scholarship programs is that the scholarships don't cover the cost of tuition at private schools.[67] A Cato Institute survey of local private schools reveals that half of 70 private schools surveyed would be within the financial reach of a child with an Opportunity Scholarship.[68] Therefore, a $3,750 scholarship could provide a private option to a significant number of D.C. children. Also, the amount of the scholarship could be increased in future years. In addition, many private schools may be able to waive tuition fees for students with vouchers barely falling below their tuition fees.

Opportunity scholarships, such as those proposed by Armey, would provide low-income D.C. students with a chance to attend a local private school. That is exactly the type of option that D.C. students and parents desperately need. Students receiving the scholarships would have the benefit of a better education. Also, the reality of a significant number of students armed with Opportunity Scholarships would stimulate expansion of the private school market in D.C., to the benefit of its residents.

If there's a problem with Armey's proposal, it is that it isn't broad enough. School choice isn't appropriate for low-income students only. All students, including the almost 60,000 who are above the income eligibility level, deserve the right to opt out. The bill could be expanded to cover more students by taking some of the funds left with the D.C. public schools to help pay for the scholarships of those students who opt to leave. There is no sound reason why the DCPS should continue to receive the same level of funding if it is educating fewer students. The chances that the bill would pass, and later be upheld in the courts, have greatly improved now that the Supreme Court has held that

**A Cato Institute survey of 70 local private schools reveals that half of them would be within the financial reach of a child with an Opportunity Scholarship.**

**Tuition tax credits are simply a way to allow parents to spend their education dollars at a private school rather than pay taxes for public schools.**

Cleveland's voucher program does not violate the Constitution's Establishment Clause.[69]

**G. I. Bill for K-12**

Another possible school choice model is a program Eleanor Holmes Norton, an opponent of vouchers for K-12, has championed for college students in the District. The College Access Act, originally approved in 1999, allows D.C. residents to attend any public college or university anywhere in the United States at in-state tuition rates or to receive $2,500 to attend any private college or historically black college or university in the country.[70] In the same way, students could receive a "voucher" allowing them to attend any public or private school in the region, starting with elementary school, rather than wait until they start college. The advantage of this approach to school choice is that it allows D.C. students access to private schools in nearby Virginia or Maryland rather than restricting them to schools in the District. In contrast, Armey's bill is limited to D.C. private schools.

**Tuition Tax Credits**

Tuition tax credits would be another way to stimulate private education in the District. A tax credit program should include tax credits for parents who pay private school tuition as well as for other taxpayers and businesses that contribute to organizations that give scholarships to children from low-income families. Under a tax credit program, parents who elect to place their child in a D.C. private school would pay the tuition themselves and receive that amount back as a credit on their District income tax.

Tuition tax credits are simply a way to allow parents to spend their education dollars at a private school rather than pay taxes for public schools. Scholarship tax credits should also be enacted to allow taxpayers and businesses to contribute to organizations that provide private school scholarships to children from low-income families. That way, all children in the districts can benefit. Arizona, Florida, and Pennsylvania already have tax scholarship programs in place.[71] In D.C. a tax credit program could bring more minorities into private schools, decrease the cost of education to society, and promote freedom of choice.[72]

**Contracting**

In March 2001, Mayor Williams suggested that the District consider turning over the poorest performing schools to private entrepreneurs. The suggestion was met with criticism from community activists, elected politicians, and school board members.[73] Since then, four schools managed by Edison Schools have opened in the District.[74] It is to early to say how well these schools have done. But 84 percent of Edison schools around the country have posted positive achievement trends.[75]

The District should explore more ways to contract education services to private contractors. To prevent one monopoly from replacing another, wherein private contractors would have neighborhood children delivered to them through coercive compulsory education laws, there should be a school choice aspect to any reform measure that involves turning schools over to private companies. Vouchers or tuition tax credits would allow parents to decide whether or not to send their children to those schools.

## Statehood: A Barrier or an Excuse?

District officials have repeatedly waved the red flag of statehood to oppose congressional reform of D.C. public education, arguing that Congress attempts to "impose" policies on defenseless citizens who lack representation in Congress and thus can't fight back. In response to Armey's bill, the D.C. Board of Education approved a resolution entitled "Opposing the Congressional Imposition of Vouchers on the District of Columbia." Council member Kevin Chavous stated, "Congress, which does not understand the culture or climate of our city, should not impose a decision on our resi-

dents—even if it is proposing funding it."[76] Eleanor Holmes Norton has been quoted at various times denouncing Congress for intervening into District issues, especially education.[77]

Norton, however, has championed choice for college students in the District. Norton worked with Congress to pass and later expand the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999, which provided $17 million in federal funding to create the D.C. Tuition Assistance Grant Program.[78] The bill allows D.C. residents to attend any public college or university anywhere in the United States at in-state tuition rates or to receive $2,500 to attend any private college or historically black college or university in the country.[79] In a May 24, 1999 press release, she praised the bill, saying it addressed "a critical educational deficit that not only affects students and other residents, but the revitalization of the city itself."[80] In the first year of the program's existence, more than 3,200 D.C. high school graduates attending schools in 37 states received grants averaging $5,270.[81] If choice is effective in higher education, then why not in K-12?

Whatever the merits of the cause, the issue of statehood should not be a reason to avoid giving students more choice. Offering students more choices won't "impose" anything on students who would benefit from a more competitive education sector.

## Conclusion

It is time for D.C. elected officials to let the children go. The problems plaguing DCPS are not with particular administrators, as critics often charge, or with congressional interference, as defenders of the status quo allege. Instead, the problems are with a system that tolerates incompetent people, passes along students even when they are not academically prepared, and restricts the choices of parents to public schools and charter schools.

A review of standardized test scores since 1978 reveals that D.C. children show up for school achieving at the national average, but that they get farther behind the longer they remain in DCPS. The D.C. system spends more than $10,000 per student yet yields disastrous educational results. The failure of the D.C. public schools didn't happen overnight, and there is little reason to believe that current administrators have the ability to overcome several decades of ingrained failure.

The Control Board identified many of the system's problems in 1996, but it failed to do one key thing: Suggest a way to allow children to opt out of D.C.'s historically dysfunctional education system.

In addition to the empirical case, there is also a basic moral case for school choice. Parents are the ones best equipped to decide what is in the best interests of their children. School choice would introduce an element of competition desperately needed in the system. The District of Columbia has not established "high standards of education accountability for every child." Instead, the record shows that the District has failed miserably in its mission to educate children. The best way to hold schools accountable is to give parents an opportunity to withdraw their children from schools that are failing them.

Unfortunately, D.C. politicians have used the issue of statehood to block positive reforms for D.C. public schools. It is time for D.C. politicians to stop putting their political concerns ahead of the concerns of students. District officials must stop blocking the exits to school choice, end the government's monopoly on education, and allow educational freedom to flourish.

**It is time for D.C. elected officials to let the children go.**

## Notes

1. Hobart M. Corning, then superintendent of DCPS, issued to the D.C. Board of Education a report titled "Your Child and the Schools" on May 16, 1951. Corning advised the Board of Education, school personnel, and the community to scrutinize the system, as Jefferson had advised Virginians to do about Virginia's education system. See "The Letters of Thomas Jefferson: 1743–1826, The University and The Schools," www.odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/P/tj3/writings/brf/jefl266.htm.

2. DCPS, "Brief History of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia," Office of the Statistician, August 28, 1946. Copies can be obtained from the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives in Washington, D.C.

3. The text continues, "and they shall receive such other instruction as is given to pay pupils, as the board may from time to time direct; and pay pupils shall, besides, be instructed in geography and in the Latin language." Ormond J. Wilson, "Eighty Years of the Public Schools of Washington—1805 to 1885," Washington, Columbia Historical Society, October 30, 1895, vol. I, p. 5. Copies can be obtained from the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives in Washington, D.C.

4. Sixty-Seventh Congress, "Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the District of Columbia, United States Senate," Washington, Government Printing Office, May 5, 6, and 13, 1921.

5. District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, "Children in Crisis: Foundation for the Future," November 12, 1996, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/longterm/library/dc/control/part1.htm. Emphasis in original.

6. Michael Powell, "Red Flags Lined Road to City's Education Crisis," *Washington Post*, September 5, 1996, p. 1.

7. Frank Ballou, then superintendent of schools, delivered this report to the Board of Education of the District of Columbia on January 18, 1939; to civic organizations, home and school associations, and the parent-teacher associations on February 7, 1939; and to all school officers on February 10, 1939. Copies of the full report can be obtained from the Sumner Museum and Archives in Washington, D.C.

8. "Sorry System," *Washington Post* editorial, March 19, 1947, p. 14.

9. George F. Strayer, *The Report of a Survey of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949), p. III.

10. Erwin Knoll, "D.C. Pupils Top Last Year's Marks in Standard Tests of 15 Subjects," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, June 26, 1959, p. A17.

11. A. Harry Passow, "Toward Creating a Model Urban School System: A Study of the Washington D.C. Public Schools," Teachers College, Columbia University, 1967, p. 2. The summary and findings of the report are available at www.lweb.tc.columbia.edu/exhibits/passow/ summary.html.

12. "The Silent Disaster," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1967, p. A12.

13. Valerie Strauss and Sari Horwitz, "Students Caught in a Cycle of Classroom Failures," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1997, p. A01

14. Ibid., p. A01.

15. The District of Columbia uses the U.S. Department of Education's definition of a dropout when reporting student dropouts for the National Center for Education Statistics on the Common Core of Data survey. The CCD dropout definition is based on a snapshot count of students at the beginning of the school year. A dropout: (1) was enrolled in school time during the previous school year and did not enroll on October 1 of the current school year; or (2) was not enrolled on October 1 of the previous school year but expected to be in membership (i.e., was not reported as a dropout the year before); (3) has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved educational program, and (4) does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: (i) transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program; (ii) temporary school-recognized absence due to suspension or illness, or (iii) death. See U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Common Core of Data Dropout Statistic: Reporting Instructions for the 1999–2000 School Year," Government Printing Office, January 2001, Appendix G. DCPS has a graduation rate of 59 percent. The national average is 71 percent. Jay P. Greene, "High School Graduation Rates in the United States," New York, Manhattan Institute, November 2001, Table 2, www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm.

16. Ben W. Gilbert, "The People of the District of Columbia: A Demographic, Social, Economic and Physical Profile of the District of Columbia by Service Areas," District of Columbia Office of Planning and Management, January 19, 1976, p. 40. Copies of this report can be obtained from the Martin Luther King Jr. Library in Washington, D.C.

17. This analysis is based on information from a series of five-year statistical reports prepared by the superintendent of schools. Most recently, see Paul L. Vance, *A Five-Year Statistical Glance at D.C. Public Schools: School Years 1996–97 through 2000–01*, Washington, Division of Educational Accountability, Student Accounting Branch, February 2002. Copies of these reports can be obtained from the D.C. Board of Education.

18. The District proudly announced this fact in a June 22, 1983, news release, "Elementary Student Test Scores Surpass National Norms," District of Columbia Public Schools, June 22, 1983. Copies

can be obtained from the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives in Washington, D.C.

19. College Board, "2001 Profile of College-Bound Seniors, High School Information, the District of Columbia," New York, College Board, 2001, p. 19. Fifty-six percent of test-takers in the District are from public schools, 44 percent are from private schools.

20. Vance, p. 42.

21. Ibid., pp. 43–44.

22. The D.C. State Education Agency as established under the federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act to help fund programs for adults over 16 who don't have a high school diploma. Housed at the University of the District of Columbia, SEA funds 23 local programs to help men and women improve their reading, math, or computer skills or learn to speak English, www.easternlincs.org/DCsite/factsstats.htm for more information.

23. Corning.

24. Justin Blum, "Half of District Teachers Weak, Board Chief Says," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2001.

25. Sari Horwitz and Valerie Strauss, "A Well-Financed Failure; System Protects Jobs While Shortchanging Classrooms," *Washington Post*, February 16, 1997, p. A01.

26. Ibid.

27. Sari Horwitz, "D.C. Study Challenges School Enrollment Data; Census Figures Show 13,000 Fewer Students," *Washington Post*, April 28, 1995, p. A01.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. David E. Cooper, "D.C. Public Schools' Modernization Program Faces Major Challenges," United States General Accounting Office, April 25, 2002.

31. In FY 2001, there were 10,967 full-time employees. Government of the District of Columbia, "Government of the District of Columbia, FY 2003 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan," Office of the Chief Financial Officer and Office of Budget and Planning, 2002, p. D-5.

32. This is according to Harcourt, designer of the Stanford-9 test. An official from the Division of Educational Accountability of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia faxed the definitions to the author.

33. "I am no apologist for D.C. public schools or for any of the rest of these public schools that are not educating our children." *Eleanor Holmes Norton; NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, April 29, 1998.

34. Vaishali Honawar, "D.C. Parents Lack School Choice Notice; Officials Scramble to Help Students Transfer under New Law," *Washington Times*, July 31, 2002, p. A01.

35. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), p. 721. "Those parts of education, it is to be observed, for the teaching of which there are no public institutions, are generally the best taught. When a young man goes to a fencing or a dancing school, he does not indeed always learn to fence or to dance very well; but he seldom fails of learning to fence or to dance."

36. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), pp. 129–30.

> "The objections which are urged with reason against State education, do not apply to the enforcement of education by the State, but to the State's taking upon itself to direct that education: which is a totally different thing. That the whole or any large part of the education of the people should be in State hands, I go as far as any one in deprecating. All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body. An education established and controlled by the State, should only exist, if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence."

37. "Governments could require a minimum level of education which they could finance by giving parents vouchers redeemable for a specified maximum sum per child per year if spent on

'approved' educational services. Parents would then be free to spend this sum and any additional sum on purchasing educational services from an 'approved' institution of their own choice. The educational services could be rendered by private enterprises operated for profit, or by non-profit institutions of various kinds. The role of the government would be limited to assuring that the schools met certain minimum standards such as the inclusion of a minimum common content in their programs, much as it now inspects restaurants to assure that they maintain minimum sanitary standards." Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 89.

38. Linda Gorman, "School Choice Improves Student Achievement," National Bureau of Economic Research, August 2002, pp. 1–2.

39. John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1990), p. 3. "Until the first few decades of the 1900s, there was really nothing that could meaningfully be called a public 'system' of education in the United States. Schooling was a local affair."

40. David Boaz, "The Public School Monopoly: America's Berlin Wall," in *Liberating Schools: Education in the Inner City*, ed. David Boaz (Washington: Cato Institute, 1991), pp. 11–12.

41. *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 16 (1947).

42. Minnesota House of Representatives Research Department, "Minnesota's Public School Fee Law and Education Tax Credit and Deduction," December 1998. "The deduction has been in effect since 1955 and allows parents to subtract from their taxable income up to $2,500 for qualifying expenses on behalf of each child in grades 7–12, and up to $1,625 for each child in grades K–6," www.house.leg.state. mn.us/hrd/pubs/feelaw.pdf.

43. "[The Cleveland Scholarship program] provides a maximum of $ 2,250 each to the families of about 3,700 mostly low-income students, enabling them to attend religious or secular private schools." Charles Lane, "Court Upholds Ohio School Vouchers; Ruling Says Program Offers Poor Families Freedom of Choice," *Washington Post*, June 28, 2002, p. A01.

44. Caroline M. Hoxby, "How School Choice Affects the Achievement of *Public* School Students," in *Choice with Equity*, ed. Paul T. Hill (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), p. 150.

45. William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson, *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2002), pp. 145–7.

46. Cecilia Rouse, "Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement: An Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," The *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 113, no. 2, (May 1998): 593.

47. Eric Pianin and Lawrence Feinberg, "D.C. Voters Reject Tax Credit; District Voters Soundly Reject Tax Credit Initiative," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1981. For a full analysis of the 1981 education tax credit initiative, see E. G. West, "An Analysis of The District of Columbia Education Tax Credit Initiative," Cato Policy Analysis D, October 27, 1981, www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa00d. html.

48. Lawrence Feinberg, "National Unit Backs Tax Credit; $114,000 Contributed to D.C. Campaign; National Group Finds Education Tax Credit Drive," *Washington Post*, October 16, 1981. Judith Valente, "2 Challenges to D.C. Education Tax Credit Initiative Are Filed," *Washington Post*, July 19, 1981, p. B9.

49. "It's a racist initiative [and] this is a predominantly black city," said council member John A. Wilson (D-Ward 2), one of the coalition members. "If it passes here, it will let them say that there is nothing racist about it." Keith B. Richburg, "Coalition Fights Educational Tax Credit Initiative: Educational Tax Credits Opposed by City Coalition," *Washington Post*, July 8, 1981, p. B1.

50. Lawrence Feinberg, "McKenzie Blasts Tax Credit; Pledges School System Fight; Superintendent Pledges Fight on Tax Credits," *Washington Post*, September 22, 1981.

51. The League of Women Voters joined five other civic groups in forming the D.C. Coalition for Public Education, a new organization to fight the education tax credit. The Save Our City Coalition, headed by City Council Chairman Arrington Dixon, tried to derail the initiative "by raising a long series of challenges about how the tax credit petition was conducted." The D.C. Elections Board ruled in early August that most of the signatures had been collected by out-of-towners who were not properly registered D.C. voters. Lawrence Feinberg, "McKenzie Blasts Tax Credit;" Judith Valente, "Candidates Criticize Tax Credit Proposal," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1981, p. C1; and Lawrence Feinberg, "Barry Says Vote for Initiative Means Tax Hike; Barry Says Vote for Referendum Means Tax Increase," *Washington Post*, October 17, 1981, p. A01.

52. Barry said at a press conference: "We make no bones about it. We will mobilize the D.C. government and do all we can to defeat this ill-conceived proposal." Lawrence Feinberg, "Barry Says Vote

for Initiative Means Tax Hike."

53. Judith Valente, "2 Challenges to D.C. Education Tax Credit Initiative Are Filed," *Washington Post,* July 19, 1981, p. B9. Lawrence Feinberg and Benjamin Weiser, "Tax Credit Initiative Ordered on Nov. 3 Ballot by Appeals Court," *Washington Post,* October 14, 1981.

54. "To exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular states, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the government of the United States, and to exercise like authority over all places purchased by the consent of the legislature of the state in which the same shall be, for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards, and other needful buildings." U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section VIII.

55. "Message to the Senate Returning Without Approval the 'District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1998,'" *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 34, 935 (May 20, 1998).

56. Supporters asked him to withdraw the bill once it became evident there were not enough votes to pass it. See Perry Bacon Jr., and Yolanda Woodlee, "McCain Backs Away From D.C. School Vouchers," *Washington Post,* June 21, 2001, p. T02.

57. Ibid, p. T02.

58. Marlene L. Johnson, "Catania in running for housing award," *Washington Times,* June 13, 2001, p. C2.

59. Bart Barnes, "Enrollment Drop Causes Problems for Local Schools; Schools Face Pupil Drop; Too Many Teachers," *Washington Post,* July 30, 1977, p. A01; Vance, p. 7.

60. "Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Statistics: Washington Metropolitan Area," Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, January 1968, Table 17.

61. The numbers were given to the author by Sharon Dunmore, coordinator of NonPublic Schools for the District of Columbia Public Schools.

62. See the Washington Scholarship Fund, www.wsf-dc.org.

63. The Board of Education denounced Williams's budget for fiscal 2002 as being inadequate although it increased spending by 4.5 percent. Robert E. Pierre, "Williams Reaching Out to Poor in Budget Plan," *Washington Post,* March 12, 2001, P. A01.

64. Jabeen Bhatti, "Williams Says Schools Should Get Private Aid; Suggests Edison as Viable Option," the *Washington Times,* March 15, 2001, p. A1.

65. The District recently announced the t9 Initiative, in which schools that have scored in ther lowest 10 percent of all schools in the last five years and showed no hint of progress were scheduled for "transformation." DCPS employees in nine schools have had to reapply for their jobs. Although highly touted by District administrators, this initiative amounts to little more than reshuffling employees. One principal estimated that 35 to 40 percent of employees had been rehired. Arlo Wagner, "Vance Puts His Faith in Transformations," *Washington Times,* August 29, 2002, p. B01. Representative William Lockridge (District 4) said he wished there was more new blood, especially for the transformation schools, for which Vance had promised new leadership but hired only one principal from outside the District. Lockridge said: "In my opinion , all we're doing is shuffing principals from one school to another. So we're still suffering." Debbi Wilgoren, "Many Schools Reopen under New Leadership," *Washington Post,* August 30, 2001, p. T09.

66. According to Edward Skala of Rep. Dick Armey's office, an enhancement scholarship (for extracurricular or specialized instruction) may not exceed $800 in fiscal year 2004 or the cost of tuition, mandatory fees and transportation, when necessary. Tuition scholarships can be used to pay for travel expenses outside of D.C. Priority will be given to previous scholarship recipients currently enrolled, prospective D.C. public school students preparing to enter kindergarten and victims of violence if there are available funds. A lottery will be held when there are more applicants than scholarships.

67. See, for example, "Talking Points," People for the American Way, www.pfaw.org/ issues/education/reports/voucher.points.html, or the National Education Association's web page on vouchers, www.nea.org/issues/vouchers/ index.html.

68. There are 83 private schools in Washington, D.C. Four could not be reached. Nine are funded by the District of Columbia Public Schools or Medicaid. Of the 70 private schools successfully contacted, 36 charge less than $5,000 per school year. Twenty of those schools charge $3,750 or less per school year.

69. *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris,* 122 S. Ct. 2460 (2002).

70. www.house.gov/norton/20020315.htm.

71. Dan Lips, "The Arizona Scholarship Tax Credit: A Model for Federal Reform," Arizona Issue Analysis 173, Goldwater Institute, Phoenix, July 31, 2002.

72. E. G. West, "Tuition Tax Credit Proposals," *Policy Review,* winter 1978, p. 61.

73. Jabeen Bhatti, p. A1.

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